

Recreation and Parks Advisory Board Meeting  
May 21, 2014 at 7:00 pm  
Department of Recreation and Parks Headquarters  
Conference Room #1  
7120 Oakland Mills Road  
Columbia, MD 21046

Members Present:

Thomas Franklin; JoAnne Kiebler; Sylvia Ramsey, Vice Chair; Janet Siddiqui; and Dan Tracy.

Members Absent:

Dr. Joel Goodman, Chair; Charlie Frekot; and Charles Parvis.

Staff Present:

John Byrd, Executive Secretary; John Marshall, Chief, Bureau of Parks and Program Services Division; Raul Delerme, Chief, Capital Projects and Park Planning Division; Laura Wetherald, Bureau of Recreation and Administrative Services Division; Seth Hoffman, Marketing Coordinator; and Barbara Anderson, Recording Secretary.

Ms. Ramsey called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Approval of Minutes:

Ms. Ramsey asked if there were any issues or questions concerning the minutes. There being no questions, Ms. Kiebler made a Motion to approve the minutes as written. Mr. Tracy seconded the Motion. The Motion passed unanimously.

Correspondence:

Mr. Byrd reported that he received correspondence via Facebook regarding the Alpha Ridge hockey rink conversion. There is a group of kids who claim to play roller hockey there every day and are not happy with the Department's decision to convert the hockey rink to Target Archery.

Mr. Byrd stated that interested parties will be attending the June 18<sup>th</sup> meeting to express their wishes regarding a community garden in the North Laurel area.

They will be speaking during the Public Comments section of the meeting rather than having a hearing at this point. After that, the Board can decide whether to proceed with a hearing sometime in the future.

Ms. Wetherald asked what property was being considered for the garden.

Mr. Byrd responded that there really isn't any property available at the North Laurel Community Center to accommodate a community garden. The Department would have to look elsewhere for suitable property.

Ms. Ramsey added that she frequently visits the Lake Elkhorn community garden. She commented that there are many young people utilizing the community garden.

Ms. Wetherald stated that there are ADA raised gardens at Long Reach.

Mr. Byrd reminded the Board that there will be no July meeting. The annual crab feast is scheduled for August 26<sup>th</sup> at Timbers of Troy.

Mr. Byrd and Dr. Goodman interviewed four prospective student members that submitted their resumes. They were all great candidates. One has been selected, and the recommendation has been sent to the County Executive's Office. The student has not been notified of his/her selection yet. He is hoping the student member will be approved in resolution at the Council meeting in June. The new member will hopefully be able to attend the June Board meeting.

Mr. Byrd reported that the Department has had an ongoing discussion with the Heroes Cricket League about the Murray Hill Cricket Pitch. This league is not affiliated with the Howard County cricket program. The County received the permits for the Murray Hill Cricket Pitch and the Heroes League did not. They are quite upset about that, because they have been using this pitch at their own discretion since they helped to get it established. Mr. Byrd has been trying to get them to come in under the Department's umbrella to help them organize access to Murray Hill and Schooley Mill. They have been civil but not cooperative. They do not want to be part of the County program and would rather remain independent.

So, the Department surveyed the field and decided to install an additional pitch at Murray Hill. That got under way this week, and there will now be two pitches at Murray Hill. Heroes will have permitting through the school system to use one pitch and the Department will program the other pitch. The program continues to grow and the Department is still looking for additional locations to add more pitches.

Ms. Ramsey asked if there was a record of how many games have been played at Schooley Mill.

Ms. Wetherald stated that there are eighteen teams in the county league, and it continues to grow.

Mr. Byrd stated that Wine in the Woods weekend was very successful. The event went very smoothly with minimal incidents. Not including staff and vendors, attendance was about 26,405. The new footprint for Symphony Woods is going to work very well for the event.

Mr. Marshall added that Incident Command received zero calls.

Mr. Byrd reported that the budget was passed this afternoon. The Operations Budget saw a 15% increase which includes fixed cost increases and raises. The operating budget now sits at \$41 mil. The budget has been steadily increasing year to year.

Ms. Siddiqui asked how the budget compared to other counties in the state.

Ms. Wetherald responded that none of the other jurisdictions have been as successful. She thought a lot of the success had to do with the self sustaining revenue. Many other jurisdictions are run by Rec Councils and volunteers with less professional staff and more fragmented programs. Wicomico County, City of Rockville, and the City of Gaithersburg are run similarly to this Department.

Mr. Byrd added that this Department is one of the few jurisdictions that is allowed to keep most of its revenue within the Department.

Mr. Franklin asked how much of the \$41 mil is self generated.

Mr. Byrd responded that almost half of the \$41 mil is self sustaining revenue. That money also includes the golf course budget.

Bureau of Parks and Program Services:

Mr. Marshall reported that all of the new License Agreements are going well. There have been no issues. They successfully transitioned the Ulman Cancer Fund Triathlon this past weekend. The swim had to be cancelled because of rain washout in the area. They converted to a run-bike-run.

The Heritage sites have opened in Ellicott City for the season.

There will be an experimental Metal Detecting program/event on June 7<sup>th</sup> at Blandair Park. Participants will be able to bring their metal detectors and do the area that will soon become Phase II baseball fields.

The Celebration of Partners in Parks committee is working on November's event.

The Chesapeake Shakespeare Company at the Patapsco Female Institute will be performing *As You Like It*. Opening night is June 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Parks Bureau is participating in the development and beta testing of the new SeeClickFix app, which will be called "Tell HoCo." It can be used by citizens to report maintenance issues to the County. The app is set to go live May 15<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Marshall is a little concerned about how this will affect snow removal.

Emerald Ash borers will be emerging this month. Mr. Marshall stated that the insects will probably destroy all of the ash trees in the County.

Work continues at the Belmont Manor House and Historic Park. Work at the Carriage House and Cottage is complete. Carpet has been installed at the Caretaker's House and the ground testing is ok. A caretaker will be in the house very soon.

Horticultural Land Management Division has been working hard to re-establish the formal gardens. They are currently doing a lot of planting.

Initial work on the Aqua Garden has begun.

The contract for work on the Manor House renovations has been awarded. Work began this week. The goal is to have the first floor finished by September 1.

The Howard County Conservancy has moved into the Carriage House and is programming the site. Patapsco Heritage Greenway is also using one of the rooms as an office.

The “outdoor only” events at Belmont will begin in June. The first wedding is scheduled for June 8<sup>th</sup>. Between the Conservancy and the events at the Manor House, there are over 70 programs planned at the Park between now and November. There will be a tent onsite during the warm weather months. The tent is rented and not owned by the Department.

In about two weeks, Mr. Marshall will be meeting with the Belmont neighbors, Rec and Parks Staff, and DNR to discuss roadway improvements.

Ms. Ramsey asked what will happen to the fields on the property.

Mr. Delorme responded that there is a contract in place for someone to do the hay.

Mr. Tracy asked how much parking is available at the site.

Mr. Marshall responded that the site has a limit of 500 people. Some areas still need to be stabilized, but there will be adequate parking.

Bureau of Capital Projects, Park Planning and Construction:

Mr. Delorme reported that the lights at Savage Park will go on this week. The lights at Kiwanis were put up last month.

There will be a ground breaking ceremony at South Branch Park in the next two to three weeks. The old water tower will be coming down sometime next week. A consultant, historian, and former mayor of Sykesville will be taking the water tower down and storing it in the old warehouse. Once the tower is down,

construction of the playground and pavilion areas will begin. Construction of the playground should be complete by August.

The Department is considering creating a pocket park in Parking Area F in Ellicott City. Mr. Delorme and Mr. Byrd met with the Ellicott City folks last week to discuss the project. Feedback was positive, so the project is moving forward. It is being funded through Planning and Zoning. Design should be complete by this fall. The existing parking lot will be moved up further to create a green pocket park area with a plaza and water feature. The stream will also be enhanced by diverting a pipe near the old Roger Carter Center to create some flowing water. Construction could start next spring.

Mr. Delorme reported that a woman approached him at the Ellicott City meeting to thank the Department for the involvement of Rangers in Tiber Park. There had been many problems in that Park until the Rangers began patrolling the area.

Holiday Hills Playground was closed down in March. There had been problems with tree roots coming up through the rubber surfacing, and some of the playground equipment was getting old. The cost to renovate the playground was as much as a new playground. There will be a meeting with the community next week to discuss installation of a new playground. Community will have input in the design of the new playground.

Mr. Byrd added that a bond bill was not approved for playground shade structures, but the County Executive has added funding into the Health Department's budget to help with the construction of shade structures. So, that project will proceed.

Mr. Byrd also reported that the Department lost the grant for the Homework Club. The Department decided that it would continue funding the program.

Ms. Ramsey asked if a shade structure will be installed at Blandair.

Mr. Delorme stated that the new playground in Phase III that has not yet been built will have a shade structure. He is trying to work something out.

Mr. Byrd added that going forward, shade structures will be part of the design plan for new playgrounds unless there is natural shade on the site.

Mr. Tracy asked how Troy Park was coming.

Mr. Delorme reported that Blandair should be going out to bid this week after an issue with the Rt. 175 interchange has been resolved. Troy is progressing according to schedule. He is hoping to have a ribbon cutting in August. One artificial turf field is completely done and a second one should be done this weekend. A lot of the paving has been done, and the lights will be done in June.

Bureau of Recreation and Administrative Service:

Ms. Wetherald reported that Recreation and Parks will continue to be a sponsor for the Friday Folders in county elementary and middle schools for the upcoming school year.

The county pools have been open all year and are ready for Memorial Day weekend.

Barbara Moore, Joynell Young and Ms. Wetherald visited the new Thomas Viaduct Middle School this week. The Department has an activity room in the school and will be doing after care programs there as well as pre-school programs during the day and adult programs in the evenings.

Camp season is coming up. There were 903 camps last year, and this year there will be 1051 different camps. Over \$2 mil in revenue is brought in just for camps. So far 14, 700 folks have registered. The Department gives over \$500,000 in scholarships to attend camp and also offers payment plans.

The next event will be the VIP July 4<sup>th</sup> Event at the Sheraton Columbia.

Ms. Wetherald distributed gift bags from Wine in the Woods to the Board.

Ms. Wetherald commented that when Wine in the Woods first started, there were nine wineries, ten food vendors and about 7,000 – 8,000 people attending. This was the first year that there were no Merriweather concerts on Friday,

Saturday or Sunday nights. She thought the event went much more smoothly without the concerts.

Old Business:

None.

New Business:

Mr. Byrd reiterated that there will be discussion next month about the community garden.

Mr. Delerme reported that the restrooms will be completed at Alpha Ridge Park by July 1<sup>st</sup>. Construction of the Observatory will probably start at the end of June or beginning of July. It could potentially be done by October or November.

Ms. Siddiqui asked about the programming of the Observatory.

Mr. Delerme answered that the Department will have a license agreement with the Astronomy Group to run the programming. The dome and telescope are ready to go.

Ms. Wetherald reminded everyone that Doris Bedsaul is retiring. Her last day will be Friday, May 30<sup>th</sup>. Ann Combs will be retiring July 1<sup>st</sup>.

There being no further discussion, Ms. Ramsey adjourned the meeting at 8:10 pm.

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Dr. Joel Goodman, Chairman

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John Byrd, Executive Secretary